

July 7, Ordinary 14C (Luke 10:1-11, 16-20; Isaiah 66:10-14; Galatians 6:[1-6], 7-16)

## **I want to be like Lizzo when I grow up.**

by [Ayanna Johnson Watkins](#) in the [June 19, 2019](#) issue



Lizzo performing in Boston, 2016. [Some rights reserved](#) by [weeklydig](#).

Lizzo is my inspiration. The pop music star is a singing, rapping, flute-playing phenomenon. She is also radically in love with her body, as she sings in “Soulmate”:

*'Cause I'm my own soulmate  
I know how to love me  
I know that I'm always gonna hold me down  
Yeah, I'm my own soulmate  
No, I'm never lonely  
I know I'm a queen but I don't need no crown  
Look up in the mirror like damn she the one*

This should not be radical, but of course it is—for a black woman to be profoundly and unapologetically in love with her body. Most of Lizzo’s songs celebrate her own

beauty, strength, and mesmerizing presence—in the midst of her admirers and in spite of her critics. At least two of her album covers feature her exposed frame, tastefully but sparsely covered. And I want to be like her when I grow up.

Biblical texts that spurn the physical body, reject the flesh, or deny our physical urges and desires are well-traveled territory with scholars. I wouldn't be the first to point out that the writings of Paul seem particularly reluctant to celebrate the flesh. This week's reading from Galatians dips a toe in this rhetoric—discouraging believers from investing in the flesh and encouraging them to sow into the Spirit instead. Likewise, in a sermon about circumcision, Paul concludes that this physical marking of the flesh or its absence is meaningless. Only the way our faith has re-created us, ostensibly via spiritual transformation, matters.

Although the biblical witness can be profoundly countercultural, this aversion to the physical body is a theme shared in our current cultural context. While there is certainly a bent within our advertising culture toward indulging the body and its desires—whether for a Big Mac or a luxury car—there is also a real-life trend toward denying our bodies. It is manifest in our general tendency (in the US at least) to sleep too little, work too much, vacation too rarely. We take pride in being too busy to take care of ourselves. We push our bodies to the max and then complain about how they look.

Yet our lectionary texts from Isaiah and Luke are different. These passages are decidedly “fleshy.” This closing text in the Isaiah canon tells of a coming restoration of Jerusalem and her people, using the metaphor of a mother's body and her nursing child—the consoling breasts, the sure hold of her comforting arms, the joyous bounce on her strong knee. There is a closeness, an intimacy to this comfort that the prophet wants to convey.

When my daughter was born, the doctor immediately placed her on my chest—encouraging me to reposition my hospital gown so that my newborn and I could be skin to skin. There was no room as a nursing mother to reject my body's requests, to fight its impulses. Instead, I had to sleep whenever I could, eat so that I had the strength to nurse, hold her firmly so she would know she was safe. The God described by the prophet wants this closeness with us—and chose a woman's fleshy, warm, loving body to make sure we got the point.

The Luke passage is less obviously about the body, but the thread is there nonetheless. This text is about a band of disciples testing out their sea legs of faith and traveling ahead of Jesus to prepare the people for his arrival. But these disciples are instructed not to pack any bags or make any reservations. They go forth equipped only with the gospel and the hope of hospitality. They are vulnerable, and they depend on those they meet along the way to meet their physical needs for shelter, food, and safety. They are encouraged to enjoy whatever is offered by their hosts, and they are not required to stay where they are not welcome.

No needless suffering is required here. What is required, however, is a sort of vulnerability: the disciples have to rely on the grace and provision of God to take care of them on their journey. And as they go faithfully, they get to experience the strength, resilience, and capacity of their bodies to manifest the power of God. They heal and deliver—allowing other bodies to experience peace and wholeness.

Both texts allow us to live into complex and divine relationships with our bodies—bodies with the capacity to manifest God's truth, God's love, and God's power. We have bodies that thrive on disciplined limits and dedicated care. These bodies can get us into trouble. They can also get us in touch with the very character of God.

I feel like I'm describing my toddler—and I love her. So maybe it's okay to love these bodies we've been given, to love them with a complex, thoughtful, tough, and merciful love. We can watch between the mundane moments of life in these bodies for a revelation of the divine.